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FILE ONLY

WHITE HOUSE DENIES TARGETING GADHAFI IN RAIDS
WASHINGTON

U.S. bombing raids on Libya last year were not planned to assassinate Moammar Gadhafi, a White House spokesman said Sunday, but "if he had been killed, there probably wouldn't have been a damp eye in the place."

The White House, responding to a report in The New York Times Sunday magazine that the raids were intended to kill the Libyan leader and his family, said "there was no plan to kill Gadhafi per se."

"What we said at the time of the bombing was and is correct -- the bombs that fell on Gadhafi's compound were targeted on a military barracks 200 meters away," said spokesman Dan Howard.

"If he had been killed, there probably wouldn't have been a damp eye in the place, but there was no plan to kill Gadhafi per se."

J Investigative journalist Seymour Hersh, quoting unidentified sources, said in the Times article that the White House ordered the assassination of Gadhafi after the CIA tried for five years to oust the Libyan leader.

The April 14, 1986, raids on Tripoli and the port city of Sidi Bilal left Gadhafi's 15-month-old adopted daughter dead and his wife and eight other children hospitalized, but the leader himself was not reported injured.

The attempt on Gadhafi's life was planned at the same time as the administration's arms deal with Iran and involved some of the same figures, including former White House national security adviser John Poindexter and his aide, Lt. Col. Oliver North, the article said.

A small group inside the National Security Council formulated the secret plot and most State Department and Pentagon officials were unaware of it, wrote Hersh. The CIA had been supporting foreign governments and exile groups to try to stage a coup in Libya since 1981 without success, the article said.

CIA Director William Casey, who headed a secret task force on Libya beginning in 1981, provided information linking Gadhafi with alleged assassination squads aimed at President Reagan and other White House officials, the article said.

But other members of the Libyan task force suspected Casey fabricated much of that evidence, the article said.

In justifying the raids, the White House cited evidence linking Libya to a terrorist bombing at a West German discotheque. However, some National Security Agency officials doubt the validity of that evidence as well, Hersh wrote.

The official bombing orders targeted military barracks and training sites for terrorists in Tripoli and Sidi Bilal but pilots were supplied with photographs depicting where Gadhafi and his family lived, the article said.

It was unclear what, if any, role President Reagan played in the assassination plans, the article said.

Hersh said his article was based on interviews with more than 70 officials at the White House, Pentagon, CIA, State Department and National Security Agency but none of the sources was named.